

THE SEÑORA'S DIAMONDS

Drawings by Frank Snapp

BY PAUL WEST

THE facts of the case," said Manager Hillegas to the under-sized, gray-faced man who faced him in his private office in the Hotel Midas, "are briefly as follows:

"Four days ago Señora Maria Ortiz of Havana registered here, with her niece, Señorita Gonzales. The Señora was a very beautiful woman of perhaps thirty-five, tall, dark, slight, and graceful. She dressed always in black, and her gowns were extremely fashionable. But what attracted particular attention to her from the moment of her arrival was a gorgeous diamond necklace she wore. The brilliance of the stones was noticeable, especially the large, pear-shaped pendant that hung in front, and Hennessy, our chief house detective, felt like suggesting to the lady that she immediately deposit the jewel in our safe, instead of wearing it so obtrusively.

"But any warning from him was unnecessary; for the first night the Señora was here she brought the necklace personally to the office, in a little Russia leather case, and asked to have it taken care of. She made special request that she be given a receipt stating the value of the jewels, which she placed at twenty thousand dollars. Now, you know that a twenty-thousand-dollar necklace is nothing out of the usual among guests of the Midas. There have been occasions when we have had a million dollars' worth of jewelry in our safes; for instance, after some big ball that has taken place here. But it is not our custom to give receipts calling for any stated sums, except in the case of money deposited with us. Our receipts usually specify just what articles of jewelry have been intrusted to us, no value mentioned.

"It was Señora Ortiz's insistence on this point that made the clerk in charge refer her to me, and she came here to my office. She told me that she was sentimentally attached to this necklace, as it had been her late husband's last gift to her before his death a year ago, and felt that she could not surround it with any too much safety. I told her of our custom in giving receipts; but, as it was a little difficult to make her understand, apparently, I finally yielded to her request, and had the office make out the receipt setting the value of the jewels at the figure she claimed.

"I should probably have done this even if I had not been sure of the value of this necklace; for I knew that there was no danger of our losing it. But, as it happens, I am pretty well informed in the matter of diamonds, and a single inspection of the Señora's diamonds convinced me that they were easily worth twenty thousand dollars. The lady thanked me, and as I escorted her to the elevator confided to me that she was quite strange in New York, having been here only once before, and that she was on her way to Europe, where her niece, Señorita Gonzales, was to be married.

"The next morning she called for her necklace, and brought it back again that night after wearing it to the opera. On this occasion she asked the clerk in charge about the ocean steamships, and on finding that a Hamburg-American boat left on the next day but one she requested that reservation be made on it for herself and Señorita Gonzales.

"In the morning she came for her necklace again, and, finding that we had reserved a stateroom on the boat, she gave the office the money for the two tickets. She was not seen about the hotel during the day; but about five o'clock she appeared dressed for going out, and stopped to make an inquiry about reaching an address on the upper West Side, where she was going for dinner. She also spoke about getting her luggage down in the morning, and then started out, when her niece addressed her in Spanish.

"Perhaps you are right," said the Señora, "my dear Elena." She turned to the clerk on duty and said, "I am going to trouble you with my necklace once more, for the last time."

"Now, I chanced to be passing through the office, and saw and heard all that took place. Señora Ortiz stooped a little, so that her niece, who was much shorter, could unclasp the necklace from her aunt's neck. When this was done, Señora Ortiz took the necklace and passed it to the clerk, saying that she had forgotten the usual jewel case, but that doubtless it would be quite as safe.

"No, I have it, Aunt Maria," said the niece, and she produced the case from her muff. She laid it on the counter and opened it, disclosing two rather unimportant rings. Placing the necklace also inside the case, she tried to close it; but evidently the added jewelry made this difficult. The clerk tried to help her, and between them they rearranged the necklace and rings and closed the box, which the clerk took, handed to the cashier, who placed it in the safe, and then gave Señora

Ortiz the receipt, which she handed to her niece.

"About ten o'clock the next morning the ladies came down dressed for going away. Previously their trunks had gone, and Señora Ortiz had sent for her bill. She had breakfast, and then came to the office, where she paid her bill and asked for her necklace, with some little pleasantry about supposing that we would be glad to get rid of her and her nuisance of a bauble.

"The same clerk who had taken the case from her on the previous day was on duty, and the same cashier who had locked it in the safe. As Señora Ortiz passed her receipt to the clerk she let a crumpled bill drop into his hand. It was a hundred-dollar note.

"For you, Señor, for your kindness in caring for my necklace," she said.

"Thanking her, the clerk turned to the cashier, who had already taken the case from the safe, and passed it to Señora Ortiz.

"Will you open it, please?" she asked him. "I think I shall wear the necklace."

"The clerk did as asked. Then he gasped. Señora Ortiz screamed, not loudly but with a suppressed, unbelieving terror. *The necklace was not in the box!*"

MANAGER HILLEGAS delivered the finishing words of his story with intense dramatic force and fixed his eyes on the listener to note their effect. But the other man could scarcely have been less excited, apparently, if he had been listening to the story of Jack and Jill. The manager wondered what sort of dumb-wit this other man was, this insignificant little creature, sent to him by the leading investigation bureau of the city as its best man. The little man merely sat silent, puffing at his cigarette, with his small, gray eyes half closed. The hotel manager continued unasked.

"The rest is short," he said. "Skillfully and quietly the astounded lady was escorted to my office here, and sank into a chair half fainting, while the clerk told me the story. Immediately I sent for Mr. Habermann, the proprietor, and, after he had learned the facts as told by the house staff, backed up by such corroboration as I could give, he directed me to pay Señora Ortiz twenty thousand dollars immediately, which I did. I gave her a check, Hennessy escorted her to the bank, and thence she hurried away in a taxi to the steamer, still only half awake, apparently, to what had occurred."

The other man continued silent; but there was a peculiar introspective look in his eyes, as though he was searching himself, rather than Manager Hillegas, for information on several points. Hillegas misunderstood that gaze; for he went on apologetically:

"I know what you think, that we made fools of ourselves in paying the money without investigation. You won't when you understand. There are two hotels in this city between which the rivalry is deadly, the Midas and the St. Mammon. The St. Mammon is a little the newer, and naturally has taken away some of our exclusive patronage; but we are holding our own through our past record. It is nip and tuck between us; but the least little accident might turn the tide away from the Midas. The St. Mammon watches every chance to prove its superiority and gain any advantage. If we had hesitated about paying Señora Ortiz the money, she would have been delayed from her trip. She would, of course, have notified the police. There couldn't have been any way of keeping the scandal out of the papers, and the publicity department of the St. Mammon would have made all that was possible out of the affair.

Every paper in Europe would have had the story through our rivals, in its worst aspect. The effect would have been ruinous. Attention would have been drawn to the fact—if it is a fact—that the St. Mammon had never been robbed. Guests who have confided fortunes to our care would desert us as rats leave a sinking ship. Even if it should be finally proved that Señora Ortiz had robbed us by some trick, the stain would be there, and it would have cost us thousands of dollars in patronage.

"Mr. Habermann has not only his fortune but his heart in the Midas. Twenty thousand dollars is not an alarming pile of money. There see, and there still seems no doubt that Señora Ortiz had lost her necklace when it was in our care. The story must not get out. So we paid the money."

"Now we have sent for you to see what is wrong. I know what your first idea is, that by some clever trick this woman has hoodwinked the hotel. But I know that the necklace was worth the money she claimed, and I know that we took it from her yesterday afternoon, and did not return it to her this morning. What became of it? Do you think it is beyond possibility to find out?"

"Nothing is beyond possibility," said Peter Kenny, with a smile. "If I showed



Even the House Detective Watched Her.